Community Forest Training Program: Management & Stewardship

February 3, 2026

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Welcome!

Warm-Up Exercise: In one sentence or less, how do you define stewardship?

Community Forest Training Program: Series Overview

5-month, virtual workshop series designed to provide land managers with the **strategies, skills, and resources** needed to create and sustain community forests.

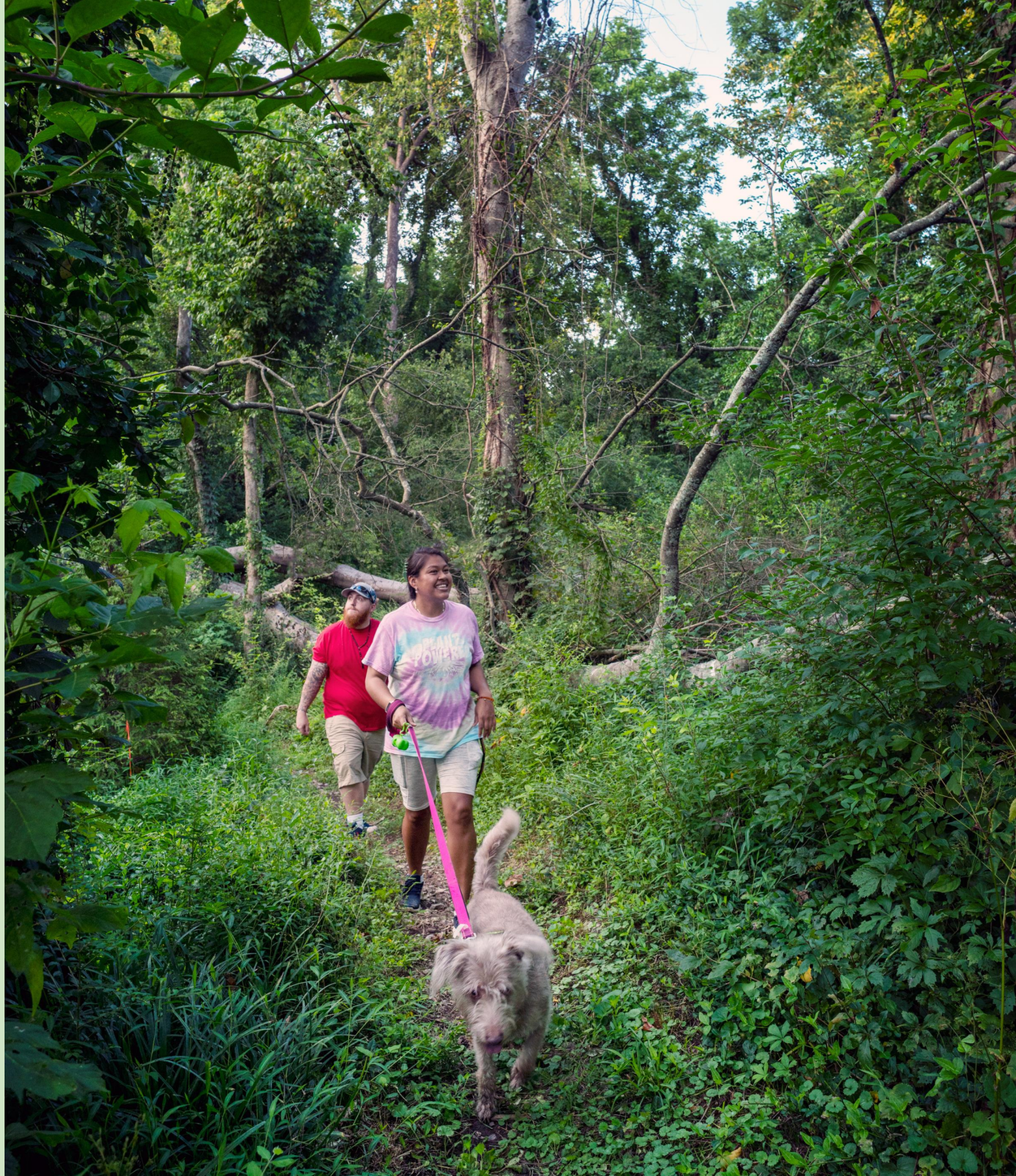
Session Dates:

- November 4: Principles of Community Forests
- December 2: Ownership, Governance, and Funding
- January 6: Community Engagement and Visioning
- February 3: Management and Stewardship

- March 3: Project Implementation

Agenda

- Session 3 Recap
- Key Principles for Long-Term Management Planning
- Case Studies:
  - McKinleyville Community Forest
  - Chimacum Ridge Community Forest
- Panel: Community Forest Management & Stewardship
- Speaker Q&A
- Next Steps



Community Engagement & Visioning

Why is broad community input critical for community forests? How do you build broad support?

- **It's not a *community* forest without *community* engagement.** Public ownership, input, and management is what sets community forests apart from other conservation projects.
- **The character of the community will influence the character of the community forest.** Community members must be bought into the long-term vision for the land in order for it to produce meaningful benefits. An established community vision sets the stage for management and stewardship.
- **Everyone needs a seat at the table.** Go beyond your usual suspects – actively seek out new stakeholders. A comprehensive, sustainable community vision means casting a wide net and bringing people into the process who may never have participated in conservation work before.
- **Be mindful of your message.** Whether you're engaging user groups or elected officials, clear and intentional messaging around the benefits and values of a community forest is critical for cultivating support.
- **Conflict is a when – not an if.** Conflict is to be expected when you're building consensus among diverse perspectives. Being prepared to manage conflict effectively is an essential component of a community forest process.

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Betsy Cook
Associate Vice President,
Maine State Director

Long Term Management & Stewardship

Bringing the Community Forest to Life!

Why does good long term management matter?

It is the path to…

- Building community and shared sense of ownership
- Bringing community's vision to life
- Responding to evolving community needs
- Activating the land
- Having fun!

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Developing a Management Plan

Management & Stewardship Approach

1. Use **Management Plan** as foundation.
    - Build Annual Implementation Plans from 10-year Management Plan
2. Determine **one entity** that can take lead on coordinating all management activities.
3. “Map” out the **constellation of partners** than can help to implement management plan. Be creative!
    - Hired contractors (e.g. forester, trail builder)
    - Non-profit partners (e.g. trail focused non-profits, education non-profits)
    - Community institutions (e.g. school system, municipal services – road maintenance)
    - Volunteer groups / days
4. **Assess** implementation and management progress annually, evaluate new needs, adapt and adjust.
5. **Celebrate** community and constellation of partners working to bring the community forest to life!

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Models for Stewardship & Management

Kingfield Community Forest

- Town ownership
- Non-profit coordinates management
  - Hires professionals
  - Organizes volunteers
- Formal agreement between Town and non-profit
- CF Committee is decision making body, approves management plan and annual implementation plans
  - Housed within town
  - Facilitated by non-profit

Bethel Community Forest

- Non-profit ownership
- Non-profit coordinates management
  - Hires professionals
  - Organizes volunteers
- CF Committee is decision making body, approves management plan and annual implementation plans
  - Housed within non-profit

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Funding

Management & Stewardship

- Management Endowment
  - Calculator
- Activation Fund
- Ongoing Grants

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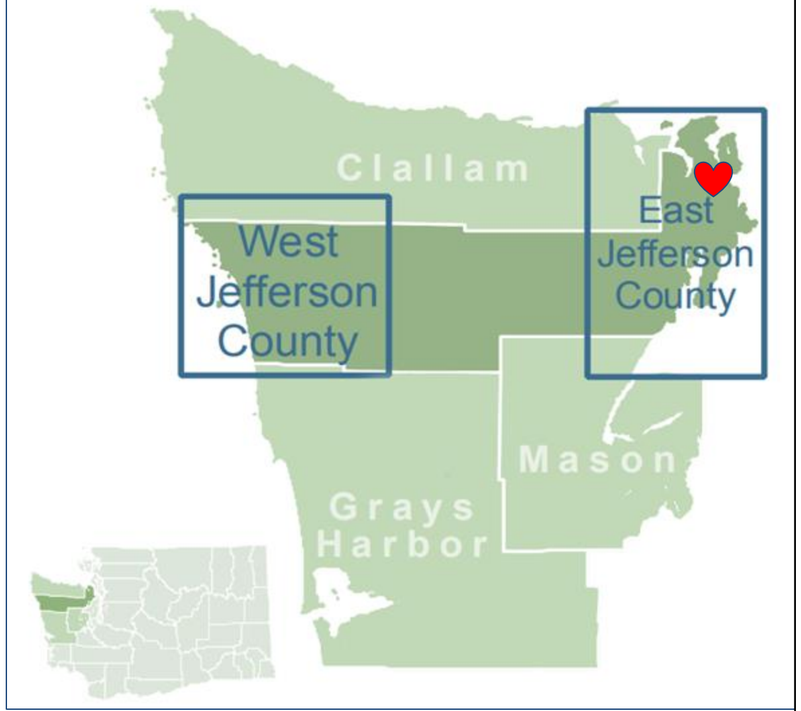
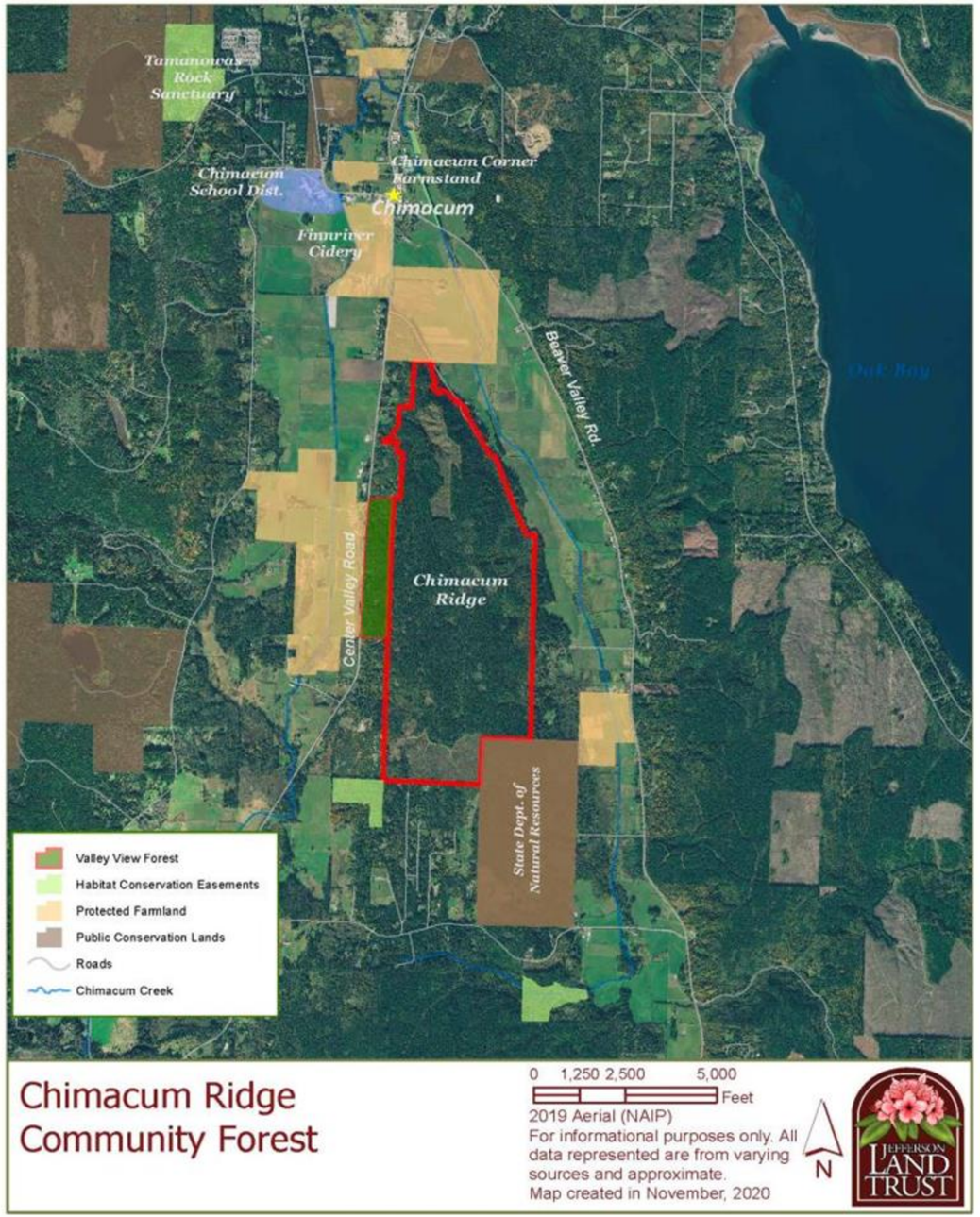
Ryen Helzer,
Chimacum Ridge
Community Forest Manager,
Jefferson Land Trust

From Vision to Stewardship
Growing a Community Forest

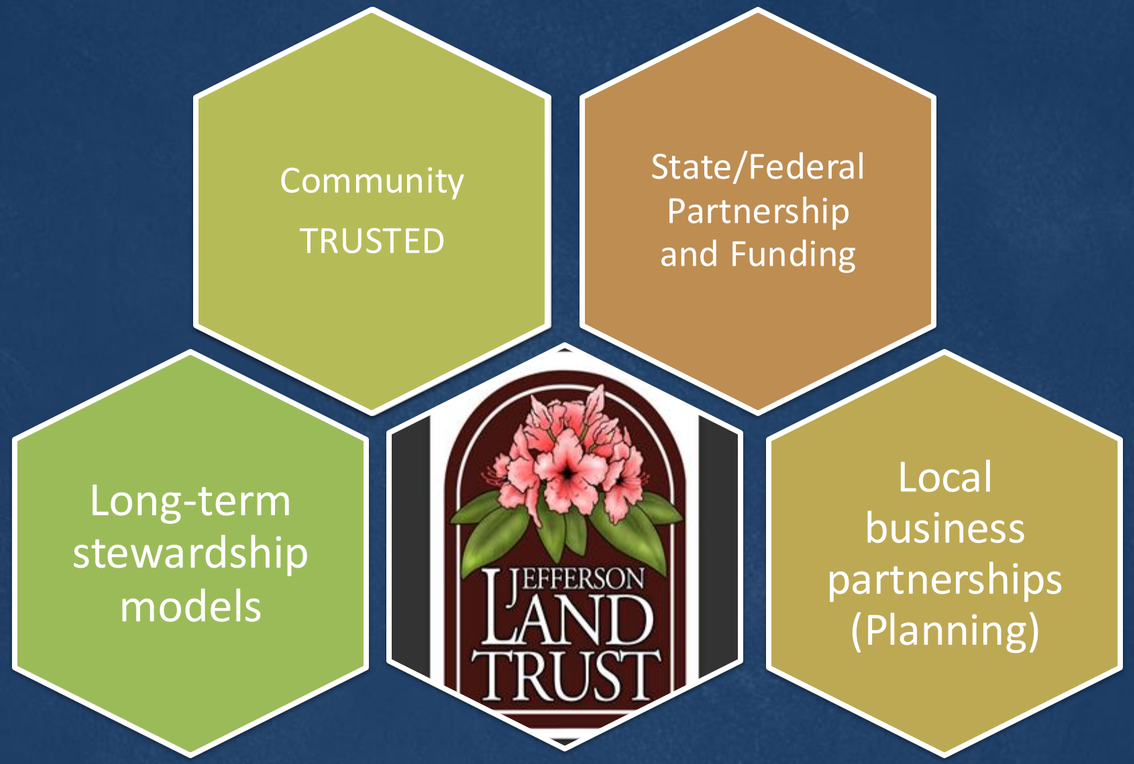
Chimacum Ridge Community Forest

Why Chimacum Ridge?





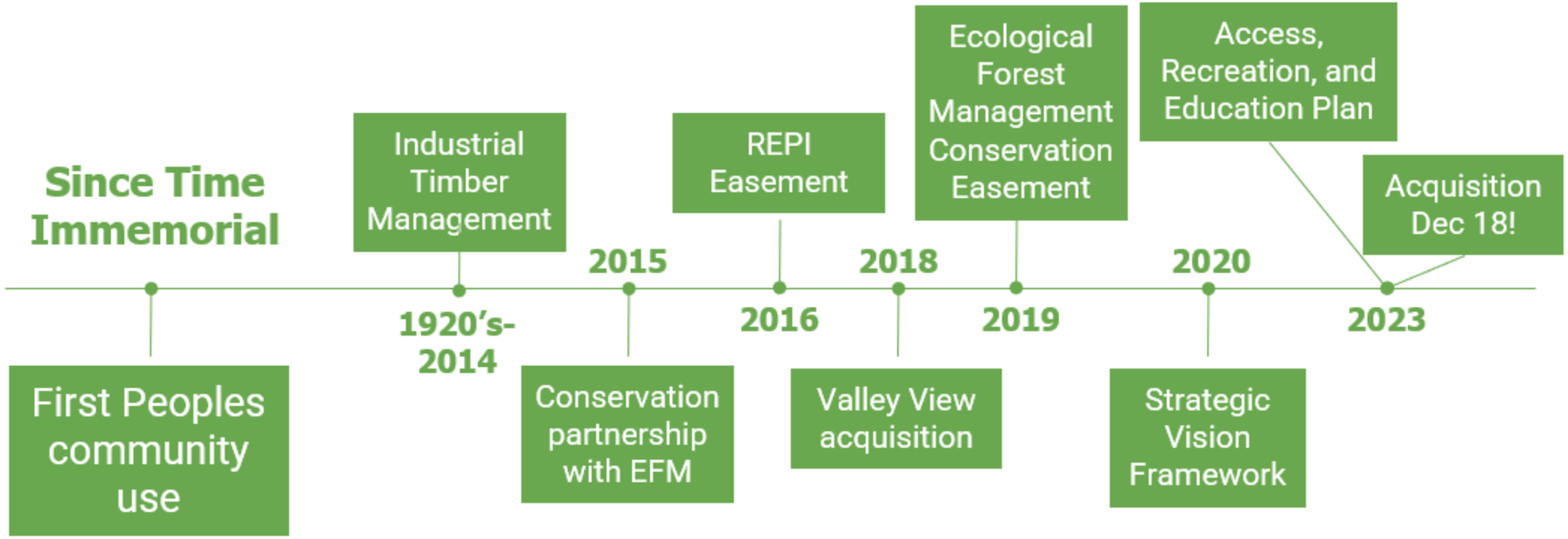
Why a Land Trust Led This Project



Community Forestry = Conservation of Forestlands (And so much more!)

Pre-Acquisition

History of Chimacum Ridge



Ancestral lands of the Chemakum and S'Klallam Tribes

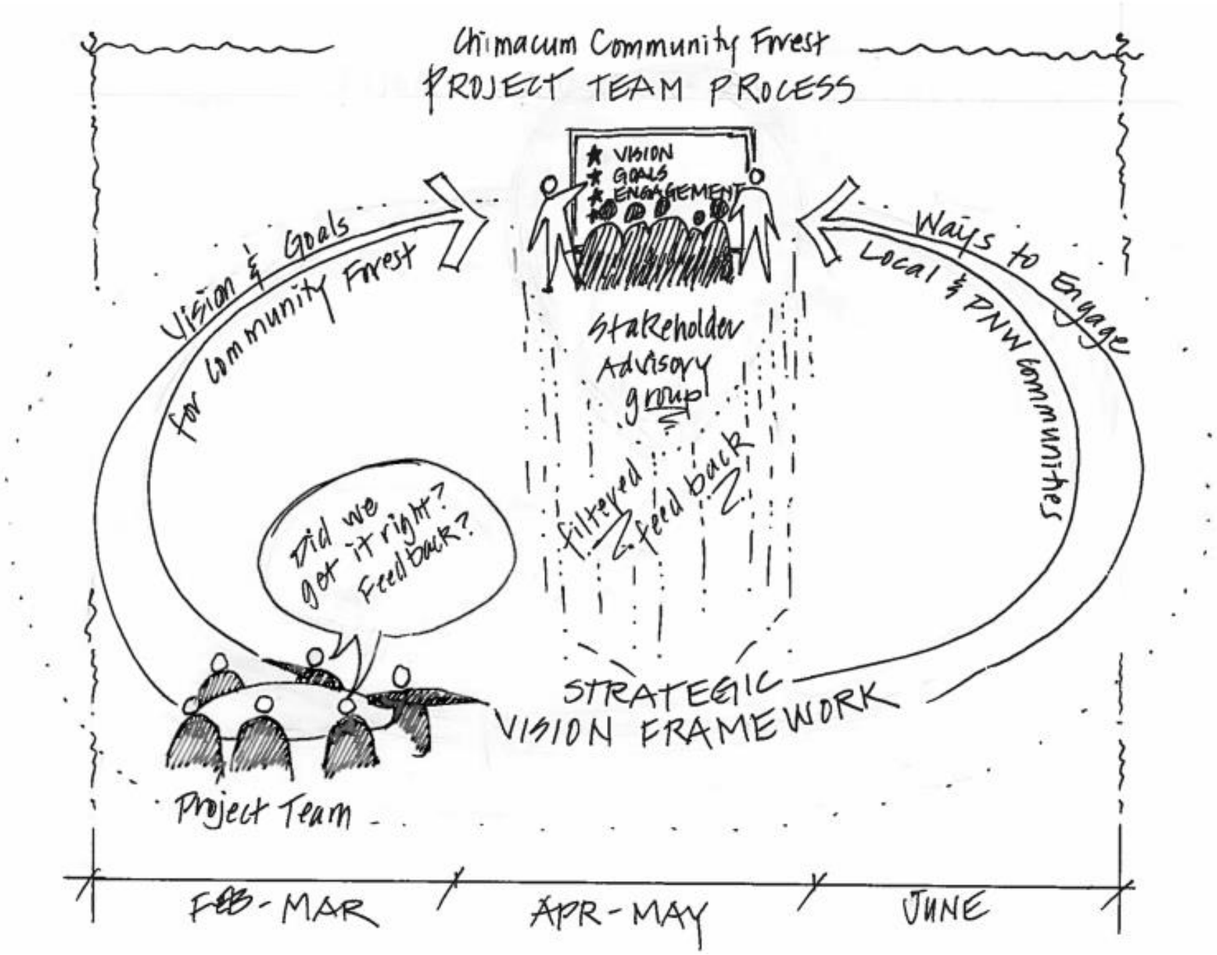
Laying the Foundation

Mission Statement

The mission of the Chimacum Ridge Community Forest is to sustain and share the ecological, cultural and economic benefits of this community-driven, working forest for generations to come.

Vision Statement

Chimacum Ridge Community Forest is a resilient forest for all, connecting communities and modeling regenerative relationships with the land.



Outcomes of the Pre-acquisition work

Chimacum Ridge Community Forest LLC Governance

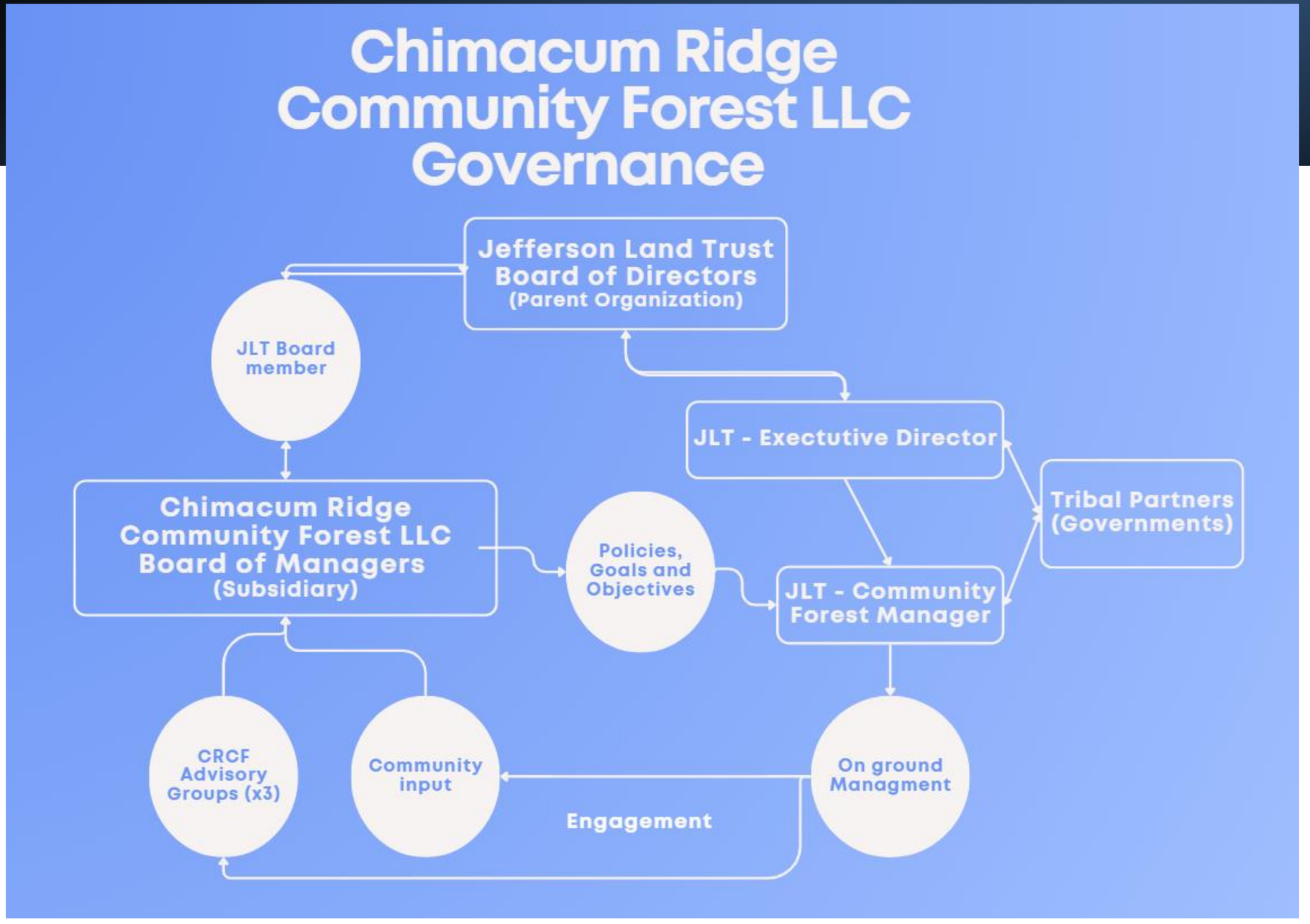
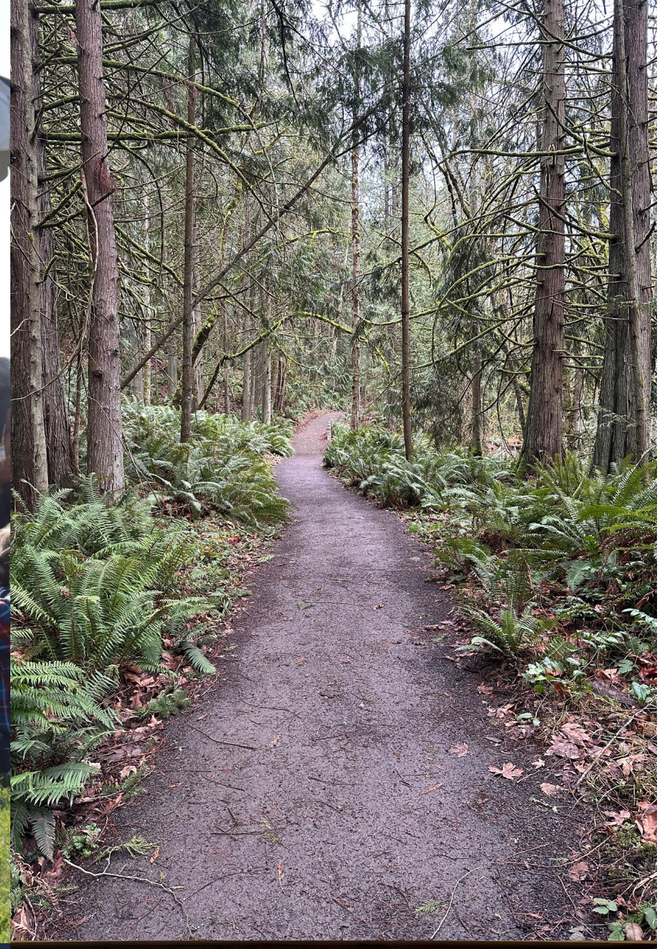
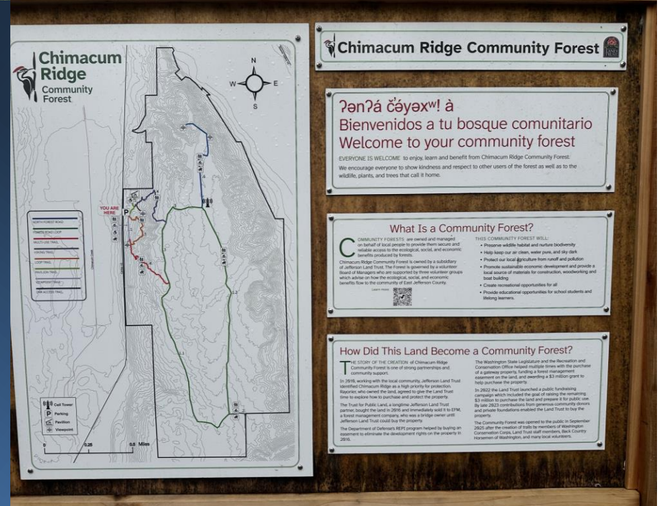


Photo Credit: Greg Sach



Opening the Forest



Early-Stage Management Reality

- Reciprocal Relationship with the Forest in perpetuity
- Comprehensive Stewardship Plan
- Policies/Procedures
- Community Engagement
- Fiscal Sustainability
- Ecological Conservation

Key Lessons

Pre-Acquisition:

- Community Engagement early allowed operations to go from Vision to operational in a short amount of time, comparatively.

- Pay for Forestry Consultation early and project the type of forestry you will be messaging in your funding requests.

Governance Structure:

- Clarity on work process “Who AND How is work expected to get done”

- Share responsibility though organization, this is a BIG undertaking.

- Be intentional here and explicit around self governance and accountability = Trust

Funding to Opening: SETTING EXPECTATIONS

- Bring community along with forest management education

- Community Forests are Donation Winners!

- Conservation Easements and Policies can limit funding sources (Carbon Compliance Market)

Early years responsibility:

- Grow together. Find local businesses and groups that are also starting journeys around shared values and build resiliency together.

- Slow it down. Lead today by stewarding for the next generation.

A Community Forest Is a Relationship

Community Forests are social agreements, not just land projects. They require continual nurturing of trust, adaptability and shared responsibility.

Many thanks to our volunteers and partners. Jefferson Land Trust continues to learn so much through their caring and dedicated acts of kindness and support.

Thank you!

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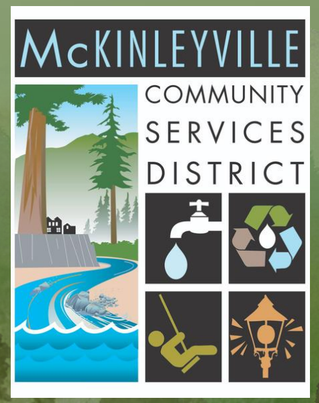
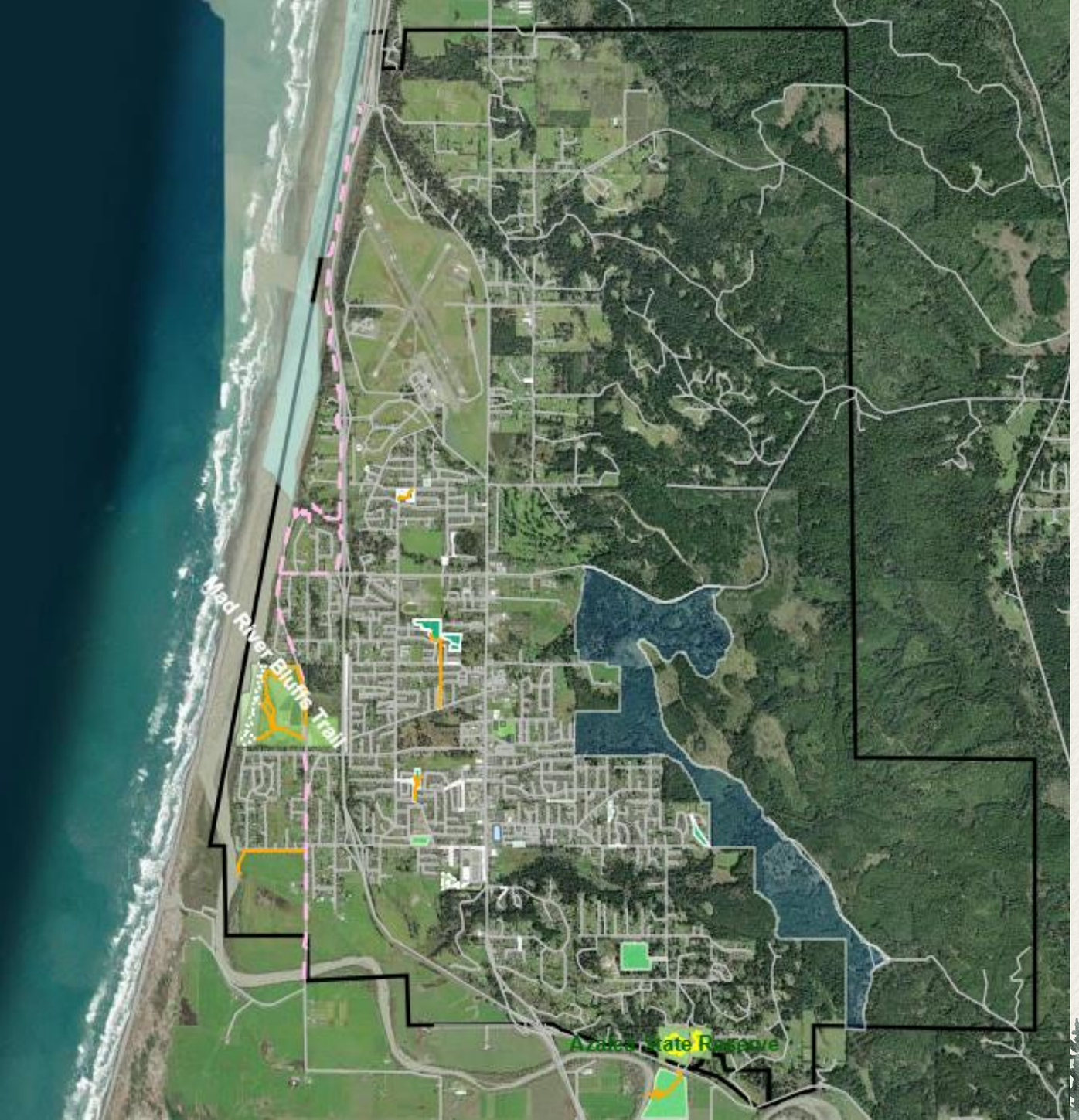
Kirsten Messmer,
Parks & Recreation Director,
McKinleyville Community Services District

McKinleyville Community Forest

Rooted in Nature. Built for Community.





McKinleyville, California

Population & Growth

- Approximately 17,000 people live in McKinleyville (2025 projection).
- It's one of the largest unincorporated communities in California and among the biggest in Humboldt County.

Households & Income

- Median household income around $66,000–$71,000.
- Average household size ~2.5 persons.
- Approximately 6,800 households.

McKinleyville Community Forest Partners

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McKINLEYVILLE COMMUNITY SERVICES DISTRICT

GREEN DIAMOND

McKinleyville Community Forest (MCF)

1st Community Forest Managed by a Community Services District in CA

MCSD Parks & Recreation acquired the property in January of 2024

599 Acres of Forest Land

The Murray Road Parking Area is the first public access point where improvements have been completed.

MCF Committee & Subcommittees

MCFC, TICS Subcommittee & FMPFB Subcommittee have monthly public meetings

Forest Management Plan & Trails Plan

The subcommittees are currently working on the Forest Management Plan and the Trails Plan.

MCF Timeline

2013

MCSD Board adopted a five-year strategic plan that included creating a community forest as an objective

November 2015

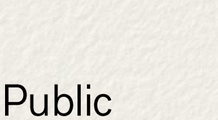
The McKinleyville Municipal Advisory Committee unanimously voted to create a community forest using one of three potential land options

2015

MCSD and The Trust for Public Land created a partnership to aid in creation of the MCF

2016- 2020

MCSD and TPL jointly applied for grants to acquire what the McKMAC described as Option 2 for a community forest



December 2020

The California Natural Resources Agency awarded TPL a $3.8 million grant to acquire and transfer 599 acres of Green Diamond land to MCSD

January 2024

MCSD, GDRCo, and TPL, closed escrow on 599 acres in northwestern Humboldt County to become the MCF

MCF Timeline (Continued)

April 2024
Amending of Rules and Regs for MCF second read through

July 2024
MCFC first meeting

November 2024
FMP Subcommittee first meeting

March 2024
Amending of Rules and Regs for MCF first read through

June 2024
Board Approved MCFC members

October 2024
TICS Subcommittee first meeting

Present Day
1 Million Dollar Congressman Huffman's Federal Funding earmark for the MCF

Management Planning Process

Daily and Long Term Management:

- Managed by MCSD's Parks & Recreation Department
- Administration Staff:
  - MCSD General Manager (Serves on MCFC)
  - Parks & Recreation Director (Serves on MCFC)
  - Environmental Programs Coordinator (Serves as MCFC Clerk)
  - MCSD Operations Director (Serves on MCFC)
  - Recreation Coordinator (Serves on MCFC)
- Maintenance/ Programing Staff:
  - Environmental Programs Coordinator
  - Parks Maintenance Supervisor
  - 4 Parks Maintenance Workers

Community Goals Consideration:

- Guided by the McKinleyville Community Forest Committee (MCFC)
- Public meetings held monthly
- Two subcommittees support the work:
  - Trails / Infrastructure / Cleanup / Security (TICS)
  - Forest Management Plan & Funding/Budget (FMP)

Implementation for First 2 Years

Challenges in Launching the Community Forest

Open to the Public – Immediately

- On Day 1 of ownership, the MCSD Board of Directors proclaimed the land public property and open for public use
- This happened before infrastructure, signage, or formal access points were in place

Starting from Scratch

- No established trail system
- No parking areas or developed entrances
- No signage, maps, or wayfinding
- No on-site amenities (restrooms, trash, etc.)

Planning While in Use

- The FMP is still being developed
- Balancing Access & Protection
- Need to provide recreation opportunities
- While protecting:
  - Sensitive habitats
  - Watersheds (Widow White & Mill Creek)
  - Long-term forest health

Ongoing Community Expectations

- High public excitement and interest
- Limited funding and staffing for immediate improvements
- Reliance on phased development, grants, and partnerships

Immediate Erosion Challenges

Widow White Creek

Mill Creek

Implementation for First 2 Years

Surprises Along the Way

Establishing the MCF Fund at Humboldt Area Foundation

- Launched with a 25k donation from a local business
- Provides opportunity for local businesses and individuals to donate to support the MCF as a tax deductible donation

Local Businesses Lending a Helping Equipment Operator

- Hooven & Co. Inc. helped to clear, level and spread gravel in the Murray Road Parking Area
- Increased safer parking for the first public access point

Unexpected Partnerships Formed Early

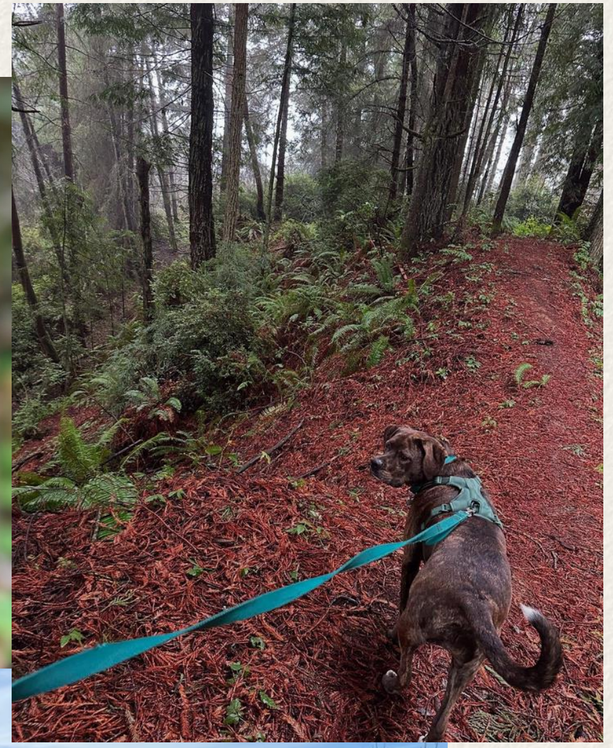
As soon as the forest became public, community groups and organizations stepped up wanting to help steward and improve the land.

Current or Emerging MOUs Include:

- Redwood Coast Bike Mountain Association
- Mountain Bike Tribal Trail Alliance
- Volunteer Trail Stewards
- Redwood Empire Endurance Riders
- Wright Tree Service

1 Million Federal Funding Ear Mark

- Thanks to advocacy from our Congressman Jared Huffman's support, this passed and will need to be spent in this Federal Fiscal Year



Thank You

McKINLEYVILLE
COMMUNITY
SERVICES
DISTRICT

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Panel Discussion: Community Forest Management & Stewardship Models

Kirsten Messmer
Parks & Recreation Director, McKinleyville Community Services District

Ryen Helzer
Chimacum Ridge Community Forest Manager, Jefferson Land Trust

Betsy Cook
AVP, Maine State Director, Trust for Public Land

David Patton (Moderator)
Trust for Public Land

Q&A

Please share your questions in the chat!

Exit Ticket

Please take 2 minutes to complete the Session 4 Exit Ticket. Your responses will be used to inform next month's Project Implementation walk-through.

https://forms.office.com/r/sdgWsnJVLY

Since 1972, TPL has protected 4 million acres of public land; created 5,364 parks, trails, schoolyards, and iconic outdoor places; raised $93 billion in public funding for parks and public lands; and connected nearly 9.4 million people to the outdoors.

To learn more, visit tpl.org.

Connecting everyone to the outdoors™

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Next Steps

- **Homework**: Share a **question** you still have about community forests and/or a **case study** you would like to workshop with TPL experts. **https://forms.office.com/r/sdgWsnJVLY**
- Report-Out Slides & Recording
- **Session 5:** Project Acquisition & Implementation March 3, 2026

Thank You!